

April 23, 2015

The Honorable Katherine B. Forrest
United States District Judge, Southern District of New York
Daniel Patrick Moynihan U.S. Courthouse
500 Pearl Street, Room 1960
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Forrest:

I am writing you about my little brother, Bryan [REDACTED] whom we lost in October of 2014, shortly after he discovered the Silk Road. He had just turned 25 years old when he died of a heroin overdose, with heroin he purchased on the Silk Road.

My father, Richard [REDACTED], has also written you a letter in which he gives a very detailed account of the events that transpired prior to my brother's death. If you have not yet read his letter, please read his before continuing on with mine. His letter is far more eloquent and detailed than mine.

My brother was smart, athletic, loveable, funny, and sensitive. He was always the bright light in the room, with people circling around him, hanging on his every word. At the same time, he was sensitive: always quick to befriend the new kid in school, or take a struggling classmate under his wing. He really was incredibly well rounded. Did I mention he was handsome too? He really had it all.

Yet, in addition to all of these amazing qualities, Bryan was also impulsive and naive. He was a daredevil on a bike and on the ski slopes, and thought he was invincible. He was really athletic, so he got away with it, but being impulsive in life is another matter.

We know from Bryan's heroin overdose that he wasn't making good decisions, but he most likely had the sense to not go seeking out drug dealers in Boston's dark alleys. Once he discovered the Silk Road one night his mind was made up – he was ordering heroin and it was as simple as a few clicks of a mouse, and it would arrive on his doorstep within just a few days. The Silk Road online market place enabled anonymity and seemed to eliminate all the risks of traditional drug transactions. No one was going to try to physically harm or rob him, and most importantly no one would know whom he was.

I often read articles about sites or services on the Internet, such as social media for instance, or online forums, and how the users feel a sense of anonymity just because they're interacting through a computer screen. I'm 31 years old, and I even see some of my peers treating social media as some sort of anonymous outlet for sharing too much information and bad decisions. Everything seems less "real" online. It's easier for people to buy too much online for instance [speaking from experience]. If I were to go to the mall, and physically handle all of my purchases - pick them out, try them on, purchase them, and then carry them around the mall, I would certainly buy much less. Yet, when I go online and remove nearly all these steps - all I have to do is scroll through a few pages, add to cart, and sometimes there's even 1 click checkout, thus I buy more. A few days later boxes show up at our door and it looks like I bought half the mall.

I think Ross Ulbricht and his supporters have been unable to see past the online nature of his crimes, and to him he probably doesn't envision any real victims. I think that a connection needs to be established from the intangible, almost imaginary online life to real life and real consequences.

Given other sites like the Silk Road keep trying to start up, and everything else in the world is developing a stronger Internet presence, I would think this would be a crucial time to set a strong precedent. If Ross Ulbricht were to receive the harshest sentence allowed by the law, perhaps it may make some of these other 'entrepreneurs' realize the true nature of these crimes - they are clearly not victimless crimes. If his sentencing can force people to see the connection between online activity and real life consequences, then perhaps it can deter them from becoming the next Ross Ulbricht.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I very much appreciate it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Lauren", is written over a large black rectangular redaction box.

Lauren

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